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French Arrest Ex-Serviceman on Spy Charge

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PARIS, Jan. 31 — A retired member of the French Air Force has been arrested and charged with spying for the Soviet Union, the Interior Ministry announced today.

French officials are said to believe that the man who was arrested was giving information to Soviet intelligence agents about the movement of French naval vessels around the Brest naval port, where France has based submarines carrying nuclear missiles since 1972.

The suspect, Bernard Sourisseau, 44 years old, described as a retired air force helicopter mechanic, was arrested about a week ago by agents of France's counterespionage police.

Officials said he was arrested in the village of Le Croisic near Saint-Nazaire, about 120 miles from Brest, a spokesman said.

The arrest came after several indications in recent years that the Soviet Union may be increasing its espionage activities against French naval targets in the Brest area, the authorities said.

Officials say Soviet fishing vessels, equipped with sophisticated electronic devices, are permanently stationed in international waters off the northwest coast of France, apparently trying to monitor the movement of French nu-

clear submarines and other vessels.

Recently, French counterespionage agents have found Soviet-registered long-distance delivery trucks driving around in the extreme northwest corner of the country with instructions to pick up nonexistent cargo in Brest and Saint-Nazaire.

French suspicions were also reportedly aroused by pressure from the Soviet Embassy in Paris for the city of Brest to be twinned with the Soviet port of Tallinn in Estonia. This would have led to increased cultural and tourist contacts between the two cities and allowed the Soviet airline Aeroflot landing rights at Brest.

But in 1983, the Mayor of Brest, Jacques Berthelot, broke off negotiations for the link with Tallinn after a Soviet airliner, coming to pick up French tourists at the Brest airport, failed to land on its first approach and then overflew the nearby French naval airbase at Landivisiau while making a second approach.

The arrest of the retired air force mechanic also appears to be another sign of increased concern the French Government has been showing in recent years about Soviet espionage, particularly against scientific targets.

Much of the concern is believed to stem from a major success achieved by the French intelligence service in 1981

and 1982, when it obtained details of the Soviet Union's espionage effort in the West from a senior K.G.B. official in Moscow, code-named Farewell.

The information provided by the K.G.B. official showed that the efforts of the Soviet Union to obtain Western technological secrets were far greater than had been suspected.

Details of the Farewell operation were first disclosed in a book published earlier this month, "The K.G.B. in France" by Thierry Wolton.

After the disclosures by Farewell, France expelled 47 Soviet diplomats in 1983 for spying.

Only three other French military servicemen have been accused of spying for the Soviet Union in recent years. In 1974, an air force sergeant was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for stealing secret military documents that he was suspected of selling to an Eastern bloc embassy.

In 1978, a retired World War II colonel in the Communist resistance movement was imprisoned for working for the Soviet Union. And in 1984 a retired air force colonel was sentenced for supplying information about the French aeronautical industry to a Soviet agent.

In 1964, a French official at NATO headquarters was convicted of spying. Another French civil servant working for NATO was convicted of spying in 1971.